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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (10/05): Further Israeli actions at Al Aqsa Mosque anger Palestinians

Main Stories:

News on the October 4 confrontations between Palestinian protestors and Israeli soldiers in the old city of Jerusalem and at Al-Aqsa mosque receives prominent coverage in the local press. The reports note that citizens under 50 years old were denied entry to the mosque to pray. During the confrontations, 40 Palestinians were arrested and 23 were injured. Senior Fatah member Hatem Abdel Qader and Kamal Khatib, the head of the Islamic movement in Israel, were also arrested after being beaten by soldiers. They were later released after Palestinian Authority (PA) Prime Minister Salam Fayyad intervened on their behalf. According to coverage, Fayyad contacted the US Consul General in Jerusalem and other consuls general seeking their help to stop the Israeli escalations. The PA Ministry of Information issued a press release yesterday condemning the Israeli actions at Al-Aqsa mosque.

The dailies report on Secretary General of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) Executive Committee Yasser Abed Rabbo announcing that PA President Mahmoud Abbas will form a committee to investigate the postponement of the vote on the Goldstone report until March 2010. The committee will prepare a report with the findings and recommendations in two weeks. In related news, Ma'an news Agency reports that the PA Minister of National Economy Bassem Khoury resigned in protest of the postponement.

In news related to the national reconciliation efforts, the dailies quote Senior Fatah leader Mohammad Dahlan stating that the Palestinian factions are eager to reach an agreement that would end the internal Palestinian division. However, Dahlan noted there are still a few unresolved issues in Egypt's plan.

Weekend stories:

Sunday, October 4:

All three dailies run front page stories quoting Egyptian diplomatic sources in Amman confirming to Al Quds newspaper that Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Aboul Gheit and Director of Intelligence Omar Suleiman will conduct talks with President Abbas in Amman tomorrow to "discuss the latest developments regarding the Palestinian national dialogue" in preparation for the signing of the reconciliation agreement in Cairo on October 22. The Egyptian newspaper Al Ahram quoted Egyptian officials noting that the reconciliation agreement will include the return of the PA headed by President Abbas to the administration of Gaza Strip, in addition to the formation of a committee of Arab states to oversee the conducting of presidential, legislative, and national council elections. The PA would also re-assume security responsibilities in Gaza, including Rafah crossing.

All three dailies also carry front page news on Egyptian President Mubarak's remarks urging Israel to "reconsider its policies toward Palestinians and Arabs," warning against its attempts to "impose facts on the ground" that will not bring peace to the region. Mubarak also added "If Israel showed good will in terms of its obligations in this regard, this would encourage Arabs to trust Israel's intentions." Mubarak also expressed his optimism regarding the American efforts to resume Palestinian-Israeli negotiations.

Jailed Palestinian Legislative Council member Marwan Al Barghouthi spoke to all three dailies through his attorney, urging Palestinians to "hold on to the demand for freezing settlement activities." He also said that Fayyad's plan should be supported by peaceful and popular resistance. Al Barghouthi also called upon the PLO Executive Committee and PLO factions to develop a large-scale national plan to launch a popular peaceful resistance movement against settlement activities and Israeli actions in Jerusalem.

All dailies highlight an unnamed PLO official saying that a number of the PLO Executive Committee members held an informal meeting yesterday to discuss the implications of postponing the vote on the Goldstone report. The official noted that the Executive Committee regards the postponement as a "mistake," adding that the Committee is waiting for the return of President Abbas from his tour abroad to discuss the issue. Meanwhile, the Arab League confirmed yesterday in a statement that it was not consulted about the decision.

Saturday, October 3:

All three dailies run front page stories on Friday's release of 19 female Palestinian prisoners in exchange for a video of kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. The deal came in the context of paving the way for a deal under which Gilad Shalit will be released in return for the release of 1,000 Palestinian prisoners. President Abbas welcomed the prisoners at his headquarters in Ramallah. Khaled Mish'al, the head of the Hamas political bureau, welcomed the release and said in a statement from Damascus that "the release of Palestinian prisoners is a step towards the release of all prisoners."

The local press report on the UN Human Rights Council agreement to postpone the vote on the draft resolution related to the Goldstone report. Palestine's permanent observer to the UN in Geneva Ambassador Ibrahim Khreisheh told reporters that more time is needed to carefully study the report. Nabil Abu Rudeineh, the spokesperson for the Office of the President, and Saeb Erekat, senior Palestinian negotiator, denied allegations by Israeli media that the PA decided not to endorse the recommendations of the report. Abu Rudeineh stressed that the postponement "came at the request of Russia, the US, and Europe, in agreement with the other groups within the Council." Riyad Al Malki, PA Minister of Foreign Affairs, told Al Ayyam that extreme pressure by the US and other countries in the Arab, Muslim, and Non-aligned groups led to the postponement.

Al Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida run front page stories on Saeb Erekat's meetings in Washington with Secretary of State Hilary

Clinton, Special Envoy George Mitchell, and other US officials. Erekat said that open and in-depth discussions took place and focused on the obligations of both the Palestinians and Israelis in accordance with the Road Map plan. Erekat stressed that negotiations should not start from scratch, but rather resume from the point at which they stopped in December 2008.

Al Quds carries a front page story quoting the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Ambassador Husam Zaki stating that Egypt will call for a meeting with all Palestinian factions on October 19, followed by the signing of the reconciliation agreement on October 22. Hamas Spokesperson Fawzi Barhoum confirmed that the meeting will involve all Palestinian factions.

BLOCK QUOTES:

1) Al-Quds independent daily runs an editorial under the title "Al-Aqsa again?" (10/05): "The Israeli government certainly bears responsibility for the measures that took place at Al-Aqsa Mosque under its full protection ... It is unacceptable and unrealistic for the Arab and Muslim world to only condemn and criticize the violations without any serious effort to exert pressure on Israel to stop these acts, which if continue, will put the whole region in danger. Israel is mistaken if it believes that it can continue with implementing these violations and plans without serious Arab, Muslim and Palestinian reactions. It should put an end to these violations before things get worse."

2) Omar Hilmi Al-Ghoul opines in Al-Hayat Al-Jadida under the title "Who stops the Israeli violations?" (10/05): "Efforts needed to stop the Zionist violations [against Al-Aqsa Mosque] exceed the ability of the Arabs and Palestinians who have already tried all means possible to stop the Israel attacks. These efforts need to be supported by the international community, as well as the Arab and Muslim states, to form a more effective and influential plan than what we have now."

RUBINSTEIN